

Fraud doesn't pay when claiming damages

Suspect submissions open to investigation

By Capt. JONATHAN THOMAS
Claims judge advocate

Thinking of submitting a fraudulent claim? Think again. The rules recently changed.

Simply put, a claim is a written demand for payment of a specified sum of money signed by a claimant or a properly designated representative. Claims against the government may be filed under a number of federal laws. Two of the most widely-known are the Federal Tort Claims Act and the Personnel Claims Act. Claims

under the PCA include claims for household goods damage. Typically, claims documented by sufficient evidence are adjudicated and paid, while unsupported or fraudulent claims are denied.

Under the former rules, it was possible to submit a claim containing fraudulent information and still receive payment. Formerly, the Claims Office simply voided any line items tainted by fraud and paid other line items that were substantiated.

Recently amended because it produced unjust results, the policy now requires claimants or their representatives to support their claims with accurate and truthful evidence or lose their entire claim. Under the new policy, the Claims Office may completely deny all line items, sub-

stantiated or not, of any claim tainted by fraud.

Examples of fraudulent activities include: submitting a claim with altered estimates that falsely represent a significant portion of the claim; submitting a claim for numerous "missing" items that were never owned in the first place; and submitting a claim in which the ages or other conditions of items were intentionally and substantially misrepresented.

If the Claims Office discovers after a claim was paid that the claim was fraudulent, it will either ask the claimant to voluntarily repay the monetary award or will initiate action to garnish the claimant's wages.

Although the vast majority of claims

filed are legitimate, any person who files a false or fraudulent claim commits a crime. Claims suspected of being fraudulent will be turned over to the proper authorities for investigation. Claims determined to be fraudulent will be prosecuted to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Persons submitting claims are encouraged to double-check their work before submitting claims for adjudication and payment. If we can answer questions or provide further assistance, please call the Claims Office at 876-9005.

Editor's note: Joe Friday and Capt. Erika McPherson contributed to this article.

Bush: Good progress in Iraq but more work remains

By KATHLEEN RHEM
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — One hundred days after major combat ended, the United States and coalition partners are making "good progress" in Iraq, President Bush said. But, he acknowledged, "We've got a lot more work to do."

Accompanied by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld during a press conference at his Crawford, Texas, ranch, the president cited improvements in security, democratic processes and the economy as

signs of progress in Iraq. In many cases, he said, infrastructure is up to pre-war conditions, which he called "satisfactory" but not "the ultimate aim."

"The ultimate aim is for the infrastructure to be the best in the region," he said.

In response to a reporter's question about continuing deaths among American troops in Iraq, Bush said the United States is "a country that grieves with those who sacrifice."

He offered "heartfelt sympathies and appreciation ... to the loved ones of any soldier who's willing to defend the securi-

ty of the United States." Bush then noted that the fighting in Iraq remains part of the broader war on terrorism.

The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, taught Americans that "our nation is vulnerable to attack," Bush said and stressed, as he has often in the past, that the best defense is a strong offense. "The best way to secure America is to get the enemy before they get us," he said.

The president pledged to not forget the lessons of Sept. 11. "I made a pledge to the American people and the (victims') families and those who grieved that we will hunt down the terrorists wherever they are and bring them to justice," Bush said. "And that's what we're going to do."

During meetings before the press conference, Bush and Rumsfeld discussed the situation in Iraq and military transformation.

"We spent time making sure that our military is configured in such a way as to represent the modern era, which means it

will be more likely that the world will be peaceful," Bush said. "A modern, strong, light, active military will make it easier to keep the peace."

Force size is a common area of debate when discussing tomorrow's military. Rumsfeld noted there are about "two dozen things we can do that reduce stress on the force" without raising the number of servicemen and women.

The secretary explained there is a "significant lag" between when additional forces might be needed and when they can be recruited, trained and equipped so it makes more sense to look into other ways to reduce stress on current troops.

However, adding more forces in the future isn't entirely out of the question. "To the extent at any point it looks as though an end-strength increase is appropriate, we, obviously, would recommend it," Rumsfeld said. "But we certainly don't see the evidence of that at the present time."



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